

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

A detailed listing of all claims that are, or were, in the present application, irrespective of whether the claim(s) remains under examination in the application are presented below. The claims are presented in ascending order and each includes one status identifier. Those claims not cancelled or withdrawn but amended by the current amendment utilize the following notations for amendment: 1. deleted matter is shown by strikethrough; and 2. added matter is shown by underlining.

1. (Currently Amended) A method for separating bast fibers existing in a bast of a bast plant, ~~characterized by~~ comprising a first step for separating the bast plant into the base and a core, a second step for pressing the bast separated from the ore, and a third step for immersing the pressed bast in an aqueous solution in order to decompose a gum existing in the bast and bonding the bast fibers to each other.

2. (Currently Amended) A method for separating the bast fibers as defined in claim 1, ~~characterized in that said~~ wherein in the second step ~~presses the bast~~ is pressed in a thickness direction of the bast fibers.

3. (Currently Amended) A method for separating the bast fibers as defined in claim 1, ~~or 2, characterized in that said~~ wherein in the second step ~~is a roller pressing step that is performed~~ the pressing is done by passing the bast between rollers or between a roller and a flat die.

4. (Currently Amended) A method for separating the bast fibers as defined in claim 3, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein a surface of the roller or the flat die is formed with convex-concave portions in order to flaw a surface of the bast in the roller pressing step.

5. (Currently Amended) A method for separating the bast fibers as defined in claim 3 ~~or 4, characterized in that said roller,~~ wherein the pressing step includes a plurality of rollers that are disposed successively in multiple stages along a direction that said bast is conveyed, and a plurality of rollers or flat dies that are disposed in multiple stages so as to respectively face said respective rollers, in order to roller press said bast by conveying said bast between said respective rollers and the rollers or flat dies, and that distances between respective surfaces of said rollers facing each other or distances between surfaces of the rollers and surfaces of the flat dies reduce from an inlet side toward an outlet side along the conveying direction.

6. (Currently Amended) A method for separating the bast fibers as defined in ~~any of~~ claim[[s]] 1 ~~to 5, characterized by,~~ further comprising a fourth step for washing the bast by spraying a aqueous solution against the bast at a pressure of MPa or more after the third step.

7. (Currently Amended) A method for separating the bast fibers as defined in ~~any of~~ claim[[s]] 1 ~~to 6, characterized in that,~~ wherein in said third step, the bast is immersed in an aqueous solution containing microorganisms that can decompose the gum, the aqueous solution

is circulated so as to flow in the bast portion and is aerated, and a solid substance is collected at a position spaced apart from the bast.

8. (Currently Amended) A method for separating the bast fibers as defined in ~~any of~~ claim[[s]] 1 ~~to 6, characterized in that,~~ wherein in said third step, the bast is put in a container formed from a perforated member, and the container is immersed in an aqueous solution containing microorganisms that can decompose the gum in a manner that a part of the container is exposed above a surface of the aqueous solution and is rotated therein.

9. (Currently Amended) A method for separating the bast fibers as defined in ~~any of~~ claim[[s]] 1 ~~to 8, characterized in that,~~ wherein the bast is cut in a longitudinal direction prior to the third step.